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Fortitude

1826-1920



*" 'Tis n't life that matters;
't is the courage you bring to it."*

— HUGH WALPOLE.



SIR Walter Scott. BART.

HUGH WALPOLE STUMBLES *Fortitude*
UPON PRICELESS LITERARY
TREASURE IN A SAN FRAN-
CISCO BOOK SHOP: Pays a Big
Sum for Long-lost Letters of Sir Wal-
ter Scott — *Author, Who Owns World's*
Finest Scott Collection, by a Strange Coin-
cidence Ends Search of Years

by

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THE long arm of coincidence, *Fortitude* stretching across an ocean, a continent and a century of time, has selected San Francisco as the one spot on the earth's surface for Hugh Walpole, the eminent English novelist, to stumble squarely on his heart's desire.

By one of those freaks of chance that makes the life of the collector a continual extra-hazardous romantic risk, Walpole is now the proud owner of a literary treasure for which he has hunted many years—ever since he began to amass England's largest collection of old editions and manuscript of Sir Walter Scott.

Nearly 150 pages of Sir Walter Scott's letters and memoranda, written to John Gibson, his attorney, during the famous

Fortitude financial battle which ended Scott's life, will leave San Francisco in Walpole's trunk when he departs.

In consideration, he will leave behind him a round sum: something under \$5000, but not very far under.

And you would n't have picked the "Wild West," off hand, as the most likely point of junction for a heap of century-old manuscript which originally came from London, and a distinguished London literary man who had wanted those particular letters ever since his boyhood. But, likely or not, that is just what has happened, as follows:

Threedaysago, Walpole dropped into the rare-book shop of John Howell on Post street, to keep a luncheon engagement.

I was to be one of the guests, and— as usual—I was ten minutes late. In those ten minutes the strange thing happened.

On Howell's desk lay a stack of neatly written letters, in a small, strong handwriting, by no means easy for modern eyes to read. Walpole glanced at the pile of papers and exclaimed:

"Where on earth did you get those?"

Howell replied they had been brought in two days before—only two days—by a gentleman whose grandfather had been Scott's lawyer.

"You don't mean these are Scott's letters to John Gibson, who handled Scott's affairs after the famous failure of James Ballantyne and Archibald Constable, the publishers?" asked Walpole.

Fortitude

"That's precisely what they are," replied Howell. "Gibson's grandson brought them in only day before yesterday. He said his mother had had the letters all her life and now wanted to sell them."

"Hm," remarked Walpole. "You may not know that I possess the largest collection of Scott's manuscript and letters in England."

"If these particular letters are what they seem to be, they're the ones I've wanted the most of all."

And thereby hang several tales—good ones, too. For of all episodes in English literary history this of Scott's financial heroism is the one that most deeply appeals to the man who wrote "Fortitude."

You may recall the opening words of

"Fortitude," regarded by many as Wal- **Fortitude**
pole's masterpiece:

"'T is n't life that matters; 't is the
courage you bring to it."

When a novelist has that theme in
him, it is small wonder that he will pay a
round price for letters written by the
master-author whose life, at its climax,
furnished the finest record of courage
in literary history.

Sir Walter, as shown by the Gibson
letters, had legal obligations of \$150,000
as a firm member of James Ballantyne
& Co., printers. When the house failed
for \$600,000, he would not agree to
bankruptcy proceedings or a partial set-
tlement, but pledged himself to repay
every dollar. It killed him; the debt was
finally paid from his life insurance.

“’Tis n’t life that matters; ’tis the courage you bring to it.”

Among the letters is one that shows the cheery spirit in which Scott took even such a matter as the sale of his furniture:

“I ask it to be advertised as the furniture in No. 39, lately occupied by Sir W.S. Your delicacy, I know, would boggle at this, but mine does not. My displeasure is, that I am not able to pay everyone their own—not on the measures necessary to effect payment. I have some reason to think that if the public are aware it is mine better prices may be given. Some folks are anxious to have even trifling articles belonging to those who have, right or wrong, made some noise in the world. I heard a fellow pass-

ing the house say: ' 'Od, I'll have one of **Fortitude**
his chairs if it cost me twenty pounds.'
Others may have a similar whim; and
if so, why should they go to brokers, to
give them the advantage which would
be gained by the creditors?"

The death of Lady Scott, when matters were at their worst, is mentioned in the same heroic spirit. "Anne (the daughter) has behaved wonderfully under this severe visitation, but is, poor thing, much exhausted. If we had Monday over (the funeral) we should all be better."

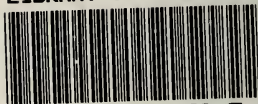
And when his health began to break under the strain of frantic writing, he wrote:

"The hyasyenus which I was obliged to take for the gravel deranged me a

Fortitude good deal, and I believe was the cause of some inaccuracies of the copy; for one day I could neither write nor spell. This is over, thank God. I return proofs and copy for 'Woodstock'—I hope they will not smack of the apoplexy—I am going to take the hill in spite of the snow."

There are dozens of such letters, with Gibson's replies, and Scott's own memoranda of business matters. They were handed down to Gibson's daughter, and now will leave San Francisco to take their place in Hugh Walpole's library of Scott—linking the author who wrote "Fortitude" with the author who showed it.

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